

House Panel Moves to Cut Federal Child

By Judith Havemann
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The House Economic and Educational Opportunities Committee moved last night to curb federal spending on child care, school lunches and other nutritional programs for the poor to carry out its part of the Republican Contract with America and reduce the federal deficit.

The committee appeared set to vote to freeze for five years the amount of money given to states for child care at \$1.94 billion a year, the current level. Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) charged that the number of needy children is expected to increase so the freeze would actually cut child care payments for more than 3.7 million children in the year 2000. The federal government has provided funds to the state for child care

payments to parents trying to get off welfare, or to those who might be forced onto the rolls without it.

Funding for the school lunch and child nutrition programs would be allowed to grow at \$1.87 billion over five years. But committee Democrats said this was not enough and would fall \$5 billion to \$7 billion short of what is needed to provide services at the current level.

Rep. William F. Goodling (R-Pa.) proposed to turn the child care and nutrition funds over to the states in a "block grant" without many of the strings that Republican governors charge have inflated the cost of the program and prevented efficient use of the money.

"We are setting broad goals and guidelines for the states, but allowing them to fill in many of the details as to exactly how

they are going to meet the goals," Goodling said. The school lunch program changes "improve it by cutting out layers of regulations and paperwork and by allowing states more flexibility in how the programs are delivered."

If child care is needed to enable welfare recipients to take jobs, the states will find it important to provide it. There will be pressure locally, Goodling said.

Democrats also attacked the bill for eliminating standards for child care at a time when studies show that 40 percent of infant and toddler day care centers already provide poor quality care.

Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-Wis.) and Marge Roukema (R-N.J.) won approval to require the National Academy of Sciences to develop voluntary nutritional standards for

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school lunches and pregnant women and children that could be used by states.

At the same time, Democrats failed to win approval for measures that will require states to provide child care for families whose parents were required to go into education training or jobs as a condition for receiving welfare benefits.

The House is moving to transform the federal welfare programs into a series of block grants to the states as part of the "Contract With America." Last week, the Ways and Means subcommittee on human relations approved three block grants—for the main welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children; for aid to the disabled; and for social services such as foster care. Sources said the Agriculture Committee, with jurisdiction over food stamps, is balking at turning its program into a block grant al-

though it is tentatively expected to begin voting on its measure next week.

Committee measures must be approved by the full House and Senate and signed by the president before they can go into effect.

The patina of bipartisan civility that characterized the Ways and Means markup last week broke down entirely yesterday as Democrats denounced the Republican bill as a "giant money-laundering scheme to write a blank check to the states . . . cost-shifting . . . a swindle . . . barbaric and a fraud."

Goodling raised his voice at the minority's laments about a lack of time to study the measure before the first vote was taken.

"It wouldn't matter if we had 952 hearings and sat here six weeks. We have fundamental philosophical differences. The programs in place for 40 years have not worked. We're going to try a different way."